



File Code: 1950
Date: June 5, 2019

Dear Forest User:

SUBJECT: Upper Pataha Project—Invitation to collaborate and comment on management options under the 1990 Umatilla National Forest Plan.

In a letter dated July 11, 2018 I invited collaboration and comment on the proposed Upper Pataha Project. I greatly appreciate the input I received from those who participated in our two collaborative field trips and provided written comments. Today I again invite you to collaborate and comment on management options for the Upper Pataha Project—this time in light of changes necessary to comply with the 1990 Umatilla National Forest Plan.

The proposed action described in my July 2018 letter was developed in compliance with the standards and guidelines of the anticipated 2019 Umatilla National Forest Plan. That plan, however, was recently withdrawn. As a result, the project must now be made consistent with the standards and guidelines of the 1990 Umatilla National Forest Plan. This necessitates changes in the project. For example, in order to meet the 1990 plan's standard for elk cover, the proposed Upper Pataha treatment area has been reduced from 2,600 acres to 2,200 acres. And, in accordance with the 1990 plan, all remnant late and old seral and/or structural live trees ≥ 21 " dbh that currently exist within stands proposed for harvest activities would now be retained.

Collaborative Field Trip: Monday, June 17, 2019

I invite all interested parties to join us on a collaborative field trip to the project area on Monday, June 17, 2019. If you plan to join us, please contact Johnny Collin, North Zone Timber Management Assistant by email: johnny.collin@usda.gov or by phone: 509-843-4643 no later than Thursday, June 13, 2019 to confirm meeting time and location.

Comment Period: Friday, June 14, 2019 to Saturday, June 29, 2019

I invite all interested parties to comment on management options for the Upper Pataha Project—in light of the 1990 Umatilla National Forest Plan. Please be sure to submit your comments no later than June 29, 2019. You will find instructions for comment submittal provided later in this letter.

Background

Authority: The project would be implemented under the 2014 Farm Bill, Section 603, Insect and Disease Categorical Exclusion (CE).

Location: The project area is located in Garfield County, Washington within portions of T 9 N, R 42 E, Sections 1- 4, 9-12, 14-23, 27- 29, 32 and 33; and T 8 N, R 42 E, Sections 4 and 5 (see attached map). The project is located entirely within the headwaters of the Pataha Creek sub-watershed. It is approximately 20 road miles SE of Pomeroy, Washington; and entirely within



the Garfield County Wildland Urban Interface (WUI).

Management Areas: The 1990 Umatilla National Forest Plan Management Areas within the project area include: MA A4- Viewshed 2, MA A6- Developed Recreation, MA C4- Wildlife Habitat, MA C5- Riparian and Wildlife Habitat, MA D2- Research Natural Area, and MA E2- Timber and Big Game.

Existing Conditions

The project area consists of a mix of previously harvested young stands, and several mature and late seral stands. Many of the younger stands were created by past timber harvest. Due to fire suppression, the older stands are at a higher density than they would be historically. Dense stands result in competition for both light and available moisture. They also prevent reproduction of shade-intolerant early seral species such as ponderosa pine and larch. Overcrowding of stands creates intense competition among trees for water and nutrients, which in turn causes stress. This makes stands highly susceptible to further insect and disease infestations, more prone to large wildfires and less desirable for some wildlife and recreational activities. By thinning overstocked timber stands, the Upper Pataha project would improve stand composition, structure and density thereby decreasing the chance of disease or insect outbreak, and making the project area more resilient to fire-disturbance. Approximately 2,600 acres of overstocked and/or insect and disease infected stands have been identified in the project area.

Purpose & Need

Treatment is needed to reduce and/or mitigate the effects of insect and disease infestations. There is also a need to make the project area more resilient to fire-disturbance through the reduction of hazardous fuels. Another need is to sustain local economies, including local forest products industries, by supplying forest products.

The purpose of the Upper Pataha project is to reduce vegetation densities and alter species composition, and to promote the growth of larger trees in the Pataha Creek Sub-Watershed. This would be accomplished by managing stand densities and compositions to more closely resemble their historic range of variability.

Proposed Action

Commercial timber harvest and non-commercial thinning would be used to manage stand density, structure, and species composition in project units totaling approximately 2,200 acres. A majority of the units would be treated using ground-based equipment; the rest would be skyline or hand thinning units.

Disposal of slash created by harvest operations would be accomplished by burning landing piles, and possibly by grapple piling slash within units. Imminent and likely danger trees along haul routes would be removed. All work would be done utilizing existing road systems and the construction of approximately 1 mile of temporary roads; temporary roads will be obliterated following use.

Instructions for Making Comments

Comments are most helpful when they identify specific issues, highlight cause and effect relationships of the proposed action, or refine the action to protect resources or interests while allowing us to be responsive to the purpose and need described above.

Electronic comments may be submitted via email to Monte Fujishin, Pomeroy District Ranger: monte.fujishin@usda.gov. Please also send a copy to Alison Arnold, Pomeroy District Environmental Coordinator: alison.arnold@usda.gov.

Hardcopy comments may be mailed, hand delivered, or faxed to the district office: Attn: Monte Fujishin; District Ranger; 71 West Main Street; Pomeroy, WA 99347. Business hours are 7:30 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. The fax number is 509-843-4621.

Oral comments may be given via telephone or in person at the district office during business hours. The telephone number is 509-843-1891.

If you have questions concerning the project or how to submit comments, please contact Johnny Collin, North Zone Timber Management Assistant by email: johnny.collin@usda.gov, or by phone: 509-843-4643.

Thank you for your interest in the Umatilla National Forest.

Sincerely,



Monte Fujishin
District Ranger
Pomeroy Ranger District

Encl.:
Map_Project Area
Map_Potential Units